

Jacopo Poli Grappas

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Last week, the staff of IWM was given a treat: a tasting of Grappas by famed Grappa-master Jacopo Poli who hails from the town of Bassano del Grappa in the heart of northern Veneto. One of the perks of working at IWM is receiving education from the winemakers themselves, but this tasting was different. Even among wine cognoscenti, Grappa still has the reputation of being “firewater”: low cost, low quality, high alcohol spirits made to get you drunk. We hate to admit that we too have carried these prejudices, and as we spent time with Poli, a man whose passion for Grappa is contagious, we saw that his Grappa are something special indeed—artisanal, delicious, complex and about the furthest thing from firewater.

We’ve chosen to give you reactions to the tasting from four of our staff: Kerry-Jo, a Sales Associate; Christy Canterbury, Wine Acquisitions Director; Tida Lenoel, Junior Wine Portfolio Manager; and Jane Nelson, also Junior Wine Portfolio Manager. Each one of these women brings her own perspective to the experience, but there’s no denying that each also came to understand Poli Grappas a bit better and to appreciate them more.

Kerry-Jo

I have never been a huge fan of Grappa, but I’ve always been curious, and recently the staff of IWM had the pleasure of meeting Jacopo Poli, the owner and producer of Poli Grappas. I was extremely impressed with how intense and alcoholic these Grappas were, yet they were also so aromatic. The Vespaiolo gave scents of peach, apple and white flowers, and the Arzente was super smooth, being aged in oak and smelling of vanilla. My favorite was the Polo Miele honey liquor, which was made with 65% blended grape must and 35% acacia honey. Its aromatics show distinct pine, lemon verbena, mint and juniper. It caught me off-guard and reminded me of something like a sweet honey gin. I am excited to get the firsthand Grappa experience so now I can help change our clients’ preconceived notions on this wonderful spirit!



Jacopo illustrates the discontinuous cycle, or the traditional method of grappa-making.

Christy

I am always impressed with quality-oriented family businesses. These businesses show that it doesn't take a lot of people, just a lot of heart and a fair amount of smarts to make something delicious, not only to share with others but to commercialize. Jacopo Poli's pride in his family's business, which his grandfather began in 1898, is evident. (He only mentioned the founding year three times.) Part of their story is transferring their craft from generation to generation, alternately named Giovanni then Giobatta as you travel down the family tree. The Poli family story is one of so many similar ones in wine that make this industry so special, and the taste of Poli's Grappas show why this specialness is so well-deserved.



Jacopo depicts the process of turning grapes into grappa.

Tida

Jacopo Poli's presentation was very well balanced and provided us all with information not just on his products, but also on Grappa itself. I knew that Grappa was made from grape pomace (the solid remains after pressing), but I didn't realize that it was the only spirit that was made from a solid and not a liquid. For example, brandy is distilled from wine, rum is distilled from sugar cane juice or molasses, and calvados is distilled from the juice of apples. To make grappa, you run steam through the pomace and distill the resulting liquid. In this way I think you really get the true essence of the grape with so many secondary and tertiary aromas and flavors—and a really tasty product.



Jacopo details how his family's Modigliani painting inspired the design of his grappa bottles.

Jane

Packaging of wine is not necessarily the gospel on the quality of the contents, but it can certainly say a lot. A **handful** of Jacopo Poli's distillates come in hand-blown glass bottles with unusually long necks—a design feature we learned was modeled after the paintings of Amedeo Modigliani, in which elegance and refinement in women were symbolized by long necks. Differentiating Grappa from Grappa is not always easy before tasting it; it all just looks like clear liquid kept in a small glass bottle and made in Italy. However, Poli's packaging sets his Grappas apart from the ubiquitous pack. These designs catch the eye and announce their elegance and refinement, hinting at what you will find inside. It may feel contradictory to say that Grappa was elegant, given its legend as a spirit first made by Roman soldiers, but Poli's are elegant, mysterious and enchanting.



Some of the IWM staff who attended the Jacopo Poli grappa tasting.